

Decoding Turkey's Lust for Regional Clout in the Middle East: A Role Theory Perspective

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This essay examines the domestic and external roots of Turkey's activism in the Middle East through the lens of role theory. Within this context, the essay falls into three sections. In the first part, the conceptual tools that are going to be used in decoding the roots of Turkish activism will be examined. The second section will discuss the national role conceptions of Turkish foreign policy elites for the Middle East, while the third section will examine the expectations of external actors about Turkey's role in the region. In the empirical sections of the essay, the methodology will involve a close examination of both Turkish foreign policy elites' and external actors' speeches, which are assumed to deliver cues about Turkey's role conceptions in the Middle East.

Keywords: *National Role Conception, National Identity, Role Prescription, Arab Spring, Turkish Model*

1. INTRODUCTION

This essay examines the domestic and external roots of Turkey's activism in the Middle East through the lens of role theory. Within this context, the essay falls into three sections. In the first part, the conceptual tools that are going to be used in decoding the roots of Turkish activism will be examined. The second section will discuss the national role conceptions of Turkish foreign policy elites for the Middle East, while the third section will examine the expectations of external actors about Turkey's role in the region. In the empirical sections of the essay, the methodology will involve a close examination of both Turkish foreign policy elites' and external actors' speeches, which are assumed to deliver cues about their ideas on the roles that Turkey should play.

What makes the Turkish case suitable for a role theory based analysis is the fact that Turkish foreign policy has recently undergone significant changes, and such a doctrinal and practical shift has led to a considerable degree of foreign policy activism, most notably in the Middle East, which has never been seen throughout the history of the Turkish Republic. Although this remarkable change is mostly ascribed to the foreign policy visions of Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP)'s leading cadres (Aras, 2009; Aktay, 2010), to date, only a few studies attempted to incorporate a particular theoretical approach to explain this identity related shift.

The application of role theory to foreign policy analysis (FPA) has offered new venues for researchers. While FPA introduced actor-based approaches to explain the foreign policy behaviours of states by looking below the nation state level,¹ its overemphasis on the cognitive dimension of foreign policy making, remains vague without an operational and descriptive framework. If the national identity is assumed to be a determinant of the foreign

¹ For a comprehensive study on the history of actor specific theoretical development in foreign policy analysis, see Valerie M. Hudson (2005:1-30).

policy, role theory, by arguing that the unique characteristics of each society and elite influence the construction of the self, self-related roles and the performance of these relevant roles (Aggestam, 2006:21-22), reveals the linkage between national identity and foreign policy behaviours. In this respect, the questions of ‘who we are?’ and ‘how are we perceived by others?’ (Kaarbo, 2003:159) that are raised by role theory, brought identity to the fore of FPA literature even before the appearance of social constructivist theories.² In the following section, the conceptual tools provided by role theory will be discussed in order to decode the identity related dynamics of Turkish activism in the Middle East.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Role theory has been inspired by sociological and psychological approaches about the roles that individuals perform in a social environment (Sekhri, 2009:425). The conceptual abundance of role theory offers an extensive and productive framework for categorizing and explaining the foreign policy behaviours of states (Thies, 2009). As Walker (1987:2) argues, the descriptive value of role theory in foreign policy analysis stems from its rich conceptual framework, which provides the researchers with images to focus on different types of analysis from state level to individual level. However, for the purpose of this paper, I will mainly focus on five concepts provided by the role theory to examine the underlying causes of Turkey’s foreign policy activism and its possible consequences in the Middle East. These concepts are national role conception, role prescription/expectation, role performance, role conflict, and role maker.

In the foreign policy analysis literature, after K.J. Holsti first coined the term ‘national role conception’ in 1970 to unveil the domestic roots of particular foreign policy preferences, the approach gradually gained disciplinary acknowledgment.³ In his own words, Holsti (1970:245-246) defines national role conception as:

the policymakers’ own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in subordinate regional systems. It is their ‘image’ of the appropriate orientations or functions of their state toward, or in, the external environment.

Similarly, thirty years after Holsti’s initial work, Krotz (2002:6) defined the national role conception as “domestically shared views and understandings regarding the proper role and purpose of one’s own state as a social collectivity in the international arena.” In this respect, national role conception refers to foreign policy elite’s domestic construction of the national-self and self-related roles that a nation is assumed to perform.

The domestic context of national self-construction is vital in grasping the factors that shape elite perceptions about the roles of their nations since ‘the answer to the question of who are enemies and friends begins at home’ (Hopf, 2002:294). In other words, domestic

² For an analysis on constructivism’s premises borrowed from role theory see Marijke Breuning (2011:20-23).

³ For studies on the nexus between role theory and foreign policy analysis see Wish (1980), Herrmann (1985; 1986), Walker (1987; 1992), Grossman (2005).

national self-construction, with its special reference to external others, constitutes 'who and what "we" are, who and what "our enemies" are, in what ways "we" are threatened by "them" and how "we" might best deal with those threats' (Weldes, 1996:283). In this regard, the cognitive process that is to shape national self and the external other is a product of history, culture and shared experiences of the nation.

The international context of the national role conception also has a decisive impact on decision makers' construction of the national self through a continuous interaction in which states take feedback. For Holsti (1970:246), foreign policy behaviours of a state are determined not only by domestically self-constructed perceptions but also by the expectations of others, which he names as 'role prescriptions'. In this regard, the term 'role prescriptions', refers to the expectations of international actors generating certain types of behaviours for the particular state under consideration. The process in which role beholders socialize or learn⁴ the expectations of others is vital in formulating or transforming the national identity and identity driven interests.

Related with the internal and external contexts of identity and role conception, change in role performances or behavioural change in terms of foreign policy should also be examined. If role performance is the actual policy behaviour of the states in a general social context (Bengtsson and Elgström, 2012:94), how do the internal and external contexts stimulate change in a state's roles and related policy preferences? The answer of this question should begin with an assumption that identities and roles are not static and subject to change depending on the conjunctural developments taking place in internal and external contexts.

In terms of domestic context, revolutions, regime changes, military coups or legal governmental changes may all result in a significant observable shift in a state's role conceptions, due to the new group's perceptions about their nation and the roles attached to this new status. In terms of external context, as a result of interaction with the external others, changes in the roles, identities and policy preferences can take place through adaptation which means 'changes in strategies and instruments in performing roles' (Breuning, 2011:30). On the other hand, such a change can also take place through the elite learning of new beliefs, norms and values that necessitates profound changes in the constituent parts of national identity such as the transformation of beliefs, norms and values of the relevant state (Harnisch 2011:10).

The concept of role conflict does also have an explanatory and operational value when roles become incompatible with each other at a certain stage of policy formulation and role performance. Holsti (1970:277) argues that foreign policy makers can adopt multiple roles in divergent international environs and on various issue areas, and that these issues and contexts may force states to adopt divergent and overlapping roles. That is, in performing different roles, a state may be confronted with conflicts that can impel its elites either to reconsider the country's foreign policy roles or prefer one or more than one of them at the expense of others.

Finally, yet importantly, is the concept of role maker, which raises the question of who describes and determines roles domestically. In FPA, role makers are assumed to be decision makers or elites that formulate and determine the roles that a state should play in dealing with its external environment. The main rationale behind this assumption is that, first, roles are considered as intersubjective and therefore shared by the rest of the society, and second, even if there has not been a consensus on the roles that the nation should play, foreign policy decisions are only taken by the elites (Cantir and Kaarboo, 2012:7).

⁴ For "state socialization" and "learning" concepts, see Thies (2010) and Harnisch (2012).

Although role theory prioritizes elites as role makers, ‘societal expectations as to what the national role should be may diverge from elite expectations or those of decision makers’ (Harnisch, 2012:50). This process also addresses a domestic contest between the perceptions of different societal groups regarding the constitutive elements of national identity, a process that can promote consensus or cause conflict. Accordingly, domestic intercultural and political encounters may either create a shared understanding of the national roles (Cantır and Kaarboo, 2012:9), which would not only justify the pursuit of foreign policies attached to a particular status but also provide legitimacy for the actual foreign policy behaviour or may display the dominance of a particular group concerning identity formation and related role conceptions at the expense of others.

Within the context of abovementioned conceptual framework, I have three assumptions that may have operational and explanatory value for the Turkish case. First, although nongovernmental organizations, networks, mass media, think tanks and public opinion seem to be influential in the foreign policy domain under AKP, national role conceptions and related policy outputs are mainly formulated by the AKP’s elites. AKP’s electoral victories in 2002, 2007 and 2011 as well as the public opinion polls on certain foreign policy issues display that elite conceptions and formulations are also shared by the masses. Second, even though I will borrow Holti’s role conceptions to explain Turkish activism in the Middle East, I argue that a new categorization of national role conceptions and a unique wording are vital to decode Turkish foreign policy. In this regard, I suggest ‘regional leader’ as the main role conception and ‘regional protector’, ‘defender of Islam’, ‘mediator’, ‘model’, ‘bridge’ and ‘liberalizer’ roles as the supplementary roles, which all require a considerable degree of activism. Third, contrary to Holsti’s underestimation of the influence of external actors on national role conceptions, because of the states’ sensitivity on their sovereignty, I argue that external actors’ role prescriptions are as influential in shaping Turkey’s national role conceptions as elites’ perception of the Turkish national self.

TURKEY’S NATIONAL ROLE CONCEPTIONS FOR THE MIDDLE EAST

The peculiarity of AKP in Turkish foreign policy lies in its determination to embrace a new role for Turkey. This represents a rupture with the past, since the foundational claim of AKP’s foreign policy doctrine includes a critique of Kemalism,⁵ which for the leading cadres of AKP, culminated in an unquestioning western orientation in Turkish foreign policy. Thus, explaining the transformation in the national role conception of Turkey during the AKP period first requires an examination of Kemalist principles as the guidelines of the so-called traditional foreign policy to find out to what extent AKP’s foreign policy vision and its new role conception represents a rupture with it.

⁵ Kemalism refers to the ideology of the followers of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic. His six principles (republicanism, nationalism, populism, revolutionism, secularism and etatism) constitute the ideational ideological core of Kemalism. Nevertheless, according to some authors, “Kemalism did not really represent a system of ideas, but was more a political practice aimed at placing the new Turkey into the orbit of reform and progress in a completely pragmatic manner”, a political practice carried out by the secularist (military and civilian) bureaucratic elites (Dumont, 1984).

The foreign policy conceptions of the Kemalist elites who founded the Turkish Republic in 1923 have been heavily influenced by the experiences of western interventionism from the Tanzimat period (1839-1876) onwards. The intentions of western powers to intervene in the domestic affairs of the Ottoman Empire developed as a clear pattern during the nineteenth century, eventually resulting in the occupation of the empire's heartland of Anatolia in 1918. However, even such a negative influence did not lead to the construction of a reactionary anti-western identity, since the Kemalist elites believed that the underlying cause of disintegration of the empire was its failure to realize a western model of modernization. Hence, the Kemalist elites initiated their modernization project, not only in terms of industrial development but also within a broader socio-cultural and political context. Such an effort had far-reaching and profound consequences in foreign policy, generating non-irredentist nationalism, republicanism and secularism as the main pillars of Kemalist foreign policy. Thus, despite its memories of the First World War, Turkey identified itself with the western world vis-à-vis the Muslim communities of the Middle East.

The worries of the Kemalist elite concerning the territorial integrity of the newly founded Turkish Republic were first exacerbated by the instabilities of the 1930s and the Second World War, and then further intensified by the Cold War. Accordingly, they viewed integration with the political, economic and military alliances of the West as vital for survival under Cold War circumstances, even though such an orientation further distanced the country from the Middle East. Yet, it is noteworthy to mention that the pre-AKP period is not displaying uniform characteristics. Turkey's isolation over its Cyprus intervention and the economic necessities that surfaced after the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) crisis (Akder, 1987:566) culminated in a policy shift towards the Arab-Muslim world. After 1974, whereas Turkey's ties with its Arab-Muslim neighbours have been strengthened, the country's relations with Israel 'grew colder' and became 'nearly meaningless' by the late 1970s (Liel, 2001:6). Turkey's reduction of the country's diplomatic representation in Tel-Aviv to *chargé d'affaires* level in the wake of Sinai War of 1956, its condemnation of Israeli gains after the Six Day Wars of 1967, its vote in favour of the United Nations General Assembly's Resolution 3379 describing Zionism as a form of racism (Fırat, Kırkçuoğlu, 2003:795), the opening of a Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) office in Ankara on August 15, 1979 and its further reduction of Turkey's diplomatic representation to the level of second secretary in 1980, following the Israeli Parliament's (Knesset) decision to declare Jerusalem as the capital city were all the outcomes of Turkey's policy shifts towards the Arab-Muslim world.

Turkey's volatile relations with the Arab-Muslim world between 1980 and 2000 have been marked with distinct ups and downs. During his tenure, Turgut Özal invested in Islam 'as a foreign policy instrument' and 'established cordial relations with the Islamic world, particularly with Middle Eastern countries' (Aral, 2001:76). In Laçiner's words, (Laçiner, 2003:175) 'Özal attached great importance to the Middle Eastern Muslim countries' and 'improved Turkey's economic relations with Iran, Iraq, Libya and Pakistan, which had been neglected for a long time.

Between 1991 and 1993 Demirel and Çiller governments pursued a carefully balanced policy towards Arab-Muslim world and Israel (Özcan, 2005:49-51). In the aftermath of 1995 elections a new coalition government was established,⁶ and during the new government's

⁶ Refahyol government was established with True Path Party (Doğru Yol Partisi-DYP) and Welfare Party (Refah Partisi-RP).

tenure Islam became prominent in Turkish foreign policy, particularly with the efforts of Necmettin Erbakan, the leader of RP and a hawkish critic of Israel (Ovalı, 2012:41) (Bozdağlıoğlu, 2003:157). The post-modern military intervention that took place on February 28, 1997 overthrew the coalition government and this event had significant repercussions on Turkey's foreign policy formulations towards the Arab-Muslim world. The new coalition government⁷ formed on June 30, 1997 under the leadership of Bülent Ecevit, preferred to strengthen the country's ties with Israel but did not distance itself from the Muslim cause to the extent that even Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit, a left wing politician, accused Israel of carrying out genocide in Palestine after Israeli attacks on civilians residing in Jenin refugee camp in 2002.

What makes the AKP period distinctive in Turkish foreign policy history is the party elite's foundational claims that represent a rupture with Turkey's traditional role conceptions hitherto been constructed by the Kemalist elites. This difference between AKP's and the Kemalist elites' national role conceptions becomes more profound when Turkey's increasingly intense engagement in Middle Eastern affairs and its subsequent confrontation with Israel are considered. In this regard, it would be meaningful to begin with the ideology of AKP which encompasses the essential ingredients of the new Turkish self and related foreign policy principles.

Despite the Islamic background of its echelons, AKP was established with a claim of 'occupying the centre-right position on the Turkish political spectrum' (Kardaş, 2010:118). That center-right position was redefined by the party in its attempt to popularize a novel ideological stand, which itself named it as conservative democracy. Though the party's policies between 2002 and 2007 is thought to serve to the liberalization of the Turkish polity under the guise of the EU (European Union), as it is claimed by the leading figures of AKP, the major ideological pillar of the party has always been conservatism in a new mould. In terms of foreign policy, unlike their predecessor RP, AKP has formulated and pursued a pro-Western foreign policy. Nevertheless, their Islamist conservative ideology has caused Islam to emerge as a significant asset of their foreign policy. In this regard, since the very early days of their government, Middle East and the Palestinian question to which Islamists have always been sensitive has been the centrepiece of AKP's foreign policy agenda.

In the foreign policy domain, AKP first engaged in a re-formulation of Turkish national identity and then diminished the role of the Kemalist military and secular elites, which had previously been influential in the foreign policy making process. In this regard, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu (2009:91) argued that Turkish society has been and still is in a 'struggle of redefining itself', which he interpreted as a natural consequence of the discrepancies between the Kemalist elite's and society's interpretations of what constitutes Turkish national identity. In Davutoğlu's lexicon, the term 'redefining' refers to the societal reformulation of Turkish identity based on Islamic-Ottoman culture and related foreign policy preferences, previously ignored by secular elites. For him, in order to cope with the challenges of globalism, it is necessary to construct a link between local and national identities (Justice and Development Party Press Release, 2012).

Similarly, Aras and Görener (2010:78-79) described the discrepancies between Kemalist and Islamist interpretations of Turkish identity as the weakness of Kemalist identity politics and criticized its reflections in Turkish foreign policy as follows: 'The republican elite, who

⁷ The new government was named as ANASOL-D, with Motherland Party (ANAP), Democratic Left Party (DSP) and Democrat Party (DP).

were granted a privileged role in the formulation of foreign policy, have strongly held onto a Western-oriented, isolationist and passive foreign policy stand, while effectively excluding mass society from constructing alternative role conceptions'.

Davutoğlu's (2009:91) second point of criticism of Kemalist identity politics is based on the unidimensional character of it, namely Westernism, which for him had prevented Turkey from responding to changes in its surrounding environment for more than 70 years. For him (Davutoğlu, 2008:78), such a unidimensional perspective has generated a peripheral role for Turkey, which could only be transcended through embracing multiple regional identities emanating from Turkey's unique geographical, cultural and historical background. From the early days of AKP government, Davutoğlu's foreign policy vision has found considerable resonance among AKP's foreign policy elites (Murison, 2006) and resulted in intense efforts to introduce new roles for Turkey.

As the current primary role conception, Turkey's role as a regional leader should be scrutinized first. The term 'regional leader' refers to a government's self-perception of leadership, which requires duties and responsibilities for a specific geographic location (Holsti, 1970:261). Regional leader role addresses two constitutive elements of the new Turkish identity that necessitated activism in the Middle East. First, the Ottoman imperial heritage as the protector of the Holy Lands is a vital component of Islamist identity and it serves as a stimulus for AKP to embrace leadership in the region. Second, the self-confidence stemming from the country's economic and political stability under AKP is another one that encouraged Turkish activism. PM Tayyip Erdoğan and Davutoğlu's words reflect both of these elements;

We cannot turn our back on Palestine, Palestinians and Gaza. They are asking us, 'What is Turkey doing in Palestine?' They are asking us, 'What is the reason behind Turkey's growing interest in the Palestinian cause?' ... They are not aware of the responsibility that we have to take on, and this responsibility has been granted to us by Turkish history and by the will of the Turkish people (Yeni Şafak, 2010).

Our economic interests also shape our foreign policy. Turkey has a big population, young people constituting half of it, and a vibrant economy, striving to be among the top ten economies of the world by 2023, which is the one hundredth anniversary of the Turkish Republic. Additionally, the Turkish private sector is very active and has a strong entrepreneurial spirit. This requires us to widen the scope of our outreach as an economic actor (MacLeod, 2011).

Second, Turkish foreign policy elites embrace a "regional protector role" in the Middle East. This role supports the regional leader role in the sense that 'it places emphasis on the functioning of providing protection for adjacent regions' (Holsti, 1970:262). Since role theory attributes significance to the question of 'how are we perceived by others', Turkey's ambition to generate regional protector role can be considered AKP's elites' concerns to restore country's Cold War image as a collaborator of western powers. This national role conception takes on greater significance in light of AKP Vice President Ömer Çelik's statement:

Turkey is not as constrained as it was in the past, when a national cause was defined within territorial limits. ... Today, Turkey has the capacity to identify issues beyond its borders as a

national cause. Compared to the static behaviour of previous governments, even on the most well-known national causes, such an understanding and transformation of foreign policy is a revolution. Thus, our prime minister has declared Gaza as a national cause (Aksoy, 2011).

The third role that I suggest for Turkey is that of ‘liberalizer’ that refers to the intense efforts to export liberal values to the Middle East as a country reconciling neo-liberal economic system and democracy. Understood as such, Turkey’s investments for the promotion of liberal values such as democracy, gender equality, transparency and accountability become more meaningful, as can be seen from President Abdullah Gül’s speech, addressing the foreign ministers of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC).

We must act with a refreshed vision – a vision in which good governance, transparency and accountability will reign, the fundamental rights and freedoms as well as gender equality are upheld, and there would be no place for blunting rhetoric and slogans. In short, we should first put our house in order. Rational thinking should be our driving force, as we draw our strength from our spiritual values (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, Press Release 2003a).

Gül’s addressing of the need to build a wider liberal community in the Middle East took on greater significance when Erdoğan advised the Egyptians to draft and adopt a secular constitution in the post-revolutionary transition period (Radikal, 2011).

Turkey’s liberalizer role became more prominent in Turkey’s support for societal demands since the outset of the Arab Spring. Addressing the AKP group in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, Erdoğan declared Turkey’s desire and support for a peaceful transition to democracy in Syria:

We had a friendship that began nine years ago but Syria failed to appreciate this. They [Syrian rulers] did not pay heed to our warnings... But we cannot remain silent in the face of this process. We will continue to display the necessary stance. I believe that the Syrian people will be successful in their glorious resistance (Today’s Zaman, 2011).

Similarly Davutoğlu stresses the mission that Turkey has undertaken as a liberalizer by claiming that, ‘Turkish foreign policy is guided by our democratic values as well as our interests. This can best be seen in our support for reform efforts in the Middle East and North Africa’ (MacLeod, 2011).

The fourth component of Turkey’s new national role conception is the ‘model role’⁸ that refers to the presentation of a state’s economic and political achievements as a model to be emulated by others with an aim to increase influence and prestige. Even though Davutoğlu argues that ‘Turkey does not have a claim to offer a model for the Middle East’ (Gürsel, 2011), this role conception is becoming visible in the foreign policy discourse of foreign policy elites. However, in order to refrain from imperialistic connotations of the term ‘model’, with a careful wording, the concept has been modified to the term ‘source of inspiration’.

⁸ Due to the current “Turkish model for the Arab Muslim world” debates, the model role is used as similar to Holsti’s example role which refers to “the importance of promoting prestige and gaining influence in the international system by pursuing certain domestic policies” (Holsti, 1970:268).

Turkish foreign policy elites have embraced model role with a special emphasis on the country's economic and political system that has successfully managed to reconcile Islam and democracy, previously considered as incompatible value systems. The following excerpt reveals Gül's inclination in as early as 2003 to introduce the so-called Turkish model to the Arab-Muslim world, and hints at Turkey's eagerness to embrace the model role.

I challenge the view that modernity and democracy based on the rule of law, political and economic participation, and gender equality cannot exist in the Muslim world. The Turkish experience proves otherwise...We have chosen integration with the world rather than isolation and reclusion; cooperation in place of confrontation; reform instead of inertia (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, Press Release 2003b).

Gül's presentation of the Turkish model thus offers a road map for other Muslim countries to achieve their domestic development through imitating the Turkish experience.

The fifth role that Turkey is assumed to perform is the 'bridge role'. The role refers to 'communication function, that is, acting as a "translator" or conveyor of messages and information between peoples of different cultures' (Holsti, 1970:268), and Turkey's attempts to found an "Alliance of Civilizations Forum" in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks fall into this category.

Fethullah Gülen, a moderate Islamist leader, first coined such a role conception when he met with Pope John Paul II to initiate an interfaith dialogue process in 1998, and this initiative seemed likely to inspire ruling AKP as well. Tayyip Erdoğan's later statements on the role of Istanbul in discrediting the clash of civilizations rhetoric also deserve attention in understanding the bridge role embraced by AKP's elites. In addressing the Second Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations, he presented Turkey as the initiator of a dialogue process between the Christian and Muslim worlds:

Istanbul brings Europe and Asia together. Istanbul is the intersection of Europe, Asia and Africa. However, more importantly, Istanbul is a melting pot for different cultures, civilizations, races, religions and languages, and holds a righteous position in the world for that...In this age, where the communication spreads swiftly and the whole world has turned into a small village, our motto is we cannot let societies have inadequate information on one another or have false or biased opinions on one another (UNOAC, 2009).

While Erdoğan gives emphasis to Turkey's contribution as a bridge to a process of dialogue between the East and West, in the meantime he designates "defender of Islam" role for Turkey concerning the Middle East. The sixth role, 'defender of Islam'⁹, requires a role performance of the protection of Islamic value system from outside attacks. Erdoğan's statement claiming that 'We did not imitate the arts and sciences of the West but unfortunately its immorality' (Radikal, 2008) represents such a conservative reflex to Western value system, and underlines the foundational claim of conservatives, whose

⁹ This role conception is used similarly with Holsti's defender of the faith role, which refers to "defending value systems from attack and undertaking special responsibilities to guarantee ideological purity for a group of states" (Holsti, 1970:264). However, for the Turkish case it has been modified as "defender of Islam".

primary task has been to adopt a Western model of industrial development, but without eroding the values that they believe hold Muslim societies together.

AKP's claim of ideological purity has allowed Turkey to adopt the role of defender of Islam. This role conception can be clearly seen in Turkey's desire to speak on behalf of the Palestinians and in its subsequent confrontation with Israel. Interestingly, this role has also become instrumental in discrediting the Turco-sceptic behaviours of the EU. For instance, Ali Babacan, former Chief Negotiator with EU, argued that Muslims were looking at the EU's attitude to see whether it would allow Turkey to become a full member of the Union or not, and he added:

We always thought the EU is a big peace project ... but then the enlargement process literally stalled. The open-door policy is no longer there... Moreover, one of the big themes about why Turkey cannot become a member of the European Union is because it is a Christian club. This is in our view very, very dangerous... Everyone is looking at what is going on. And what kind of Europe, what kind of European Union we are going to be seeing in the future is going to be of immense importance in terms of what kind of message our region gets (Hürriyet Daily News, 2011).

Babacan's inclination to associate Turkey's membership with expectations in the Muslim world demonstrates the fact that, even though the EU did not voice such concerns explicitly, Turkey assumes a defender of Islam role both by representing itself as the representative of the Muslim world in Europe and by highlighting its religious uniqueness in a broad organization characterized by an overwhelming Christian majority. Similar concerns were expressed by Erdoğan when he claimed that 'Turkey's future does not depend on EU membership, but the future of Christianity and Islam does' (Financial Times, 2005).

The seventh role that Turkey is assumed to perform is the 'mediator' role. Since the role refers to 'fulfilling and undertaking special tasks to reconcile conflicts between other states or group of states' (Holsti, 1970:265), Turkey's attempts to reconcile the strained relations between Iran and 5+1 (permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany) countries, Davutoğlu's personal efforts to manage the conflict between Syria and Israel prior to 2010, intense diplomatic moves carried out by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the conflict between Georgia and Russia and the attempts to embrace a mediator role between Assad regime and Western powers in the aftermath of the Arab Spring fall into this category.

So far, the multiple role conceptions of AKP's leading cadres have been examined to demonstrate the domestic self-constructed motives of Turkey concerning the Middle East. Yet, for a comprehensive analysis, the role prescriptions or expectations of external actors should also be scrutinized to understand the international roots of Turkish activism in the Middle East. Such an analysis will demonstrate to what extent the role prescriptions of external actors are overlapping or diverging with the Turkish foreign policy elite's own national role conceptions.

EXTERNAL ACTORS' ROLE PRESCRIPTIONS FOR TURKEY

Turkey's increasing activism in the Middle East cannot be reduced to the self-constructed role conceptions of the AKP's echelons, or to the cultural, historical or political characteristics of Turkey. Rather, the international context also influences this process. The

ideas, norms and values generated by the international society, as well as the conjunctural developments and expectations of other actors, should also be considered in order to grasp the external roots of Turkey's national role conceptions and related activism in the Middle East. While the conjunctural developments that forced Turkey to focus its attention on the Middle East are mainly Russian and EU policies, as well as the unprecedented Arab Spring, the role prescriptions of external others that coincided with Turkey's national role conceptions are model and mediator roles.

Turkey's increasing dependency on Russia's energy resources and Moscow's swift recovery after the war in Chechnya have determined the limits of Turkish activism, both in the Caucasus and in Central Asia. Meanwhile, the EU's emergence as a soft power in the Balkans diminished Turkey's role in the region, while governmental changes in France and Germany resulted in the emergence of reluctant behaviour towards Turkey's EU membership. Under these circumstances, the Middle East remained as the only area that the Turkish foreign policy elites could concentrate on. Finally, yet importantly, the Arab Spring also impelled Turkey to reconsider its national role conceptions in the sense that the *zeitgeist* for liberty has created its own policy requirements for Turkey in the Middle East. These international and regional contexts also generated new role prescriptions for Turkey, and decoding these role prescriptions is essential for finding out to what extent the expectations of others have influenced Turkey's activism in the Middle East.

The September 11 attacks and the US's quest to formulate new policies in order to cope with radical Islam in the Middle East have produced a role prescription for Turkey, which is called the 'Turkish model for the Arab-Muslim World'. Within this context, Turkey was introduced and promoted as a model to be emulated in a reactionary environment against Western involvement and values. In fact, such a role prescription was not new, and similar concerns about the role that Turkey was expected to perform appeared among political and intellectual circles after the demise of the Soviet Union.¹⁰ In this regard, whether Turkey could be a model for the peaceful transitions in Central Asia and Caucasia had become a central theme in the foreign policy agendas of the US and Turkey during the early 1990s.

While Turkey failed to perform its expected model role in the 1990s, the Arab Spring has renewed the debates about the applicability of the Turkish model this time for the Middle East. Thus, together with Turkey's self-constructed role conceptions for the region, the seeds of Turkish activism in the Middle East were planted by the continuous calls for a Turkish model made by the external actors. As it is previously mentioned, the model role has been embraced by Turkey with a careful modification as 'source of inspiration'.

Though a deconstruction of the Turkish model is beyond the scope of this essay, it is worth mentioning that its main pillars were the peaceful co-existence of Islamic and secular value systems, and its commitment to neo-liberal economic policies (Kirişçi, 2011:34). Admitting the peculiarity of the so called Turkish model, Altunışık (2005:47) argues that, the essentials of Turkish model are the country's experience of secularism, democratization and international influences that are still significant in the political structure of Turkey.

In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, such a role expectation was first voiced by the US, as Paul Wolfowitz (2002), then US Deputy Defence Secretary underlined Turkey's uniqueness as a country that managed to reconcile Islam and democratic values. In the following excerpt, he points out the components of the Turkish model:

¹⁰ For a comprehensive analysis on the Turkish model during the early 1990s, see Şule Kut Sule Kut (2002:5-12).

Modern Turkey demonstrates that a democratic system is indeed compatible with Islam... Turkey's success can demonstrate to the world's 1.2 billion Muslims that there is a far better path than the path of destruction and despair offered by the terrorists and demonstrate that the benefits of free and prosperous and open societies are available equally to Muslims as to everyone.

Wolfowitz's call for a Turkish model in the Middle East took on a new meaning with the establishment of the Greater Middle East Initiative (GMEI) in 2003, which later turned into the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENAI) in 2004. The initiative was based on the promulgation of a neo-liberal value system in the Middle East, with Turkey's task as a co-president country being to promote 'women's rights and democratization' (Akman, 2011). Within the GMEI, Turkey was expected to perform a model role that could inspire other Muslim states in the region, and such a role prescription found considerable resonance among Turkish foreign policy elites (Bağcı and Sinkaya, 2007). Nevertheless, the initiative remained idle because of the US intervention in Iraq and Turkey's subsequent rejection of a parliamentary bill allowing the deployment of US troops on Turkish territory.

The calls for a Turkish model were renewed within a couple of years, and such a project became a matter of debate within both Western and Arab-Muslim political circles, especially after the outbreak of the Arab Spring. In fact, the Obama administration paid much more attention to introduce Turkey as a model than had any other previous governments. Obama's visit to Turkey on April 6-7, 2009 was his first international presidential visit to a Muslim state. This visit not only demonstrated the importance that the new administration attached to Turkey but also conveyed Obama's messages regarding US concerns about Islam and Turkey's role in the Middle East:

I think where there's the most promise is in the idea that Turkey and the United States can build a model partnership in which a majority Christian and a majority Muslim nation, a Western nation and a nation that straddles two continents - that we can create a modern international community that is respectful, secure and prosperous. This is extremely important. One of the strengths of the US is that we have a Christian population, but we feel ourselves a nation of citizens. Modern Turkey was built on similar values as a secular country respecting religious freedom, rule of law and all freedoms. We are going to deliver this message to the world (Today's Zaman, 2009).

Similarly, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated that Turkey's outstanding economic performance together with its democratic political system could inspire the people in the Arab-Muslim world who were seeking reforms (The Guardian, 2011).

French President Nicholas Sarkozy has also generated role prescriptions for Turkey. In an interview with Turkish journalist and columnist Mehmet Ali Birand, Sarkozy, while reaffirming his stance against Turkey's EU membership, addressed the significance of Turkey in the emerging Middle Eastern political scheme. For him, instead of insisting on EU membership, Turkey should give priority to the Middle East, since no other country in the region could perform such an instrumental role in assisting the transformation of the region (Birand, 2011).

Turkey's intriguing economic performance and its commitment to liberal values did not only evoke admiration among the Western governments that are trying to cope with economic recession, but also made the country a source of inspiration that many Arab-

Muslim elites have gravitated towards. Rasheed Al Gannushi, one of the most prominent figures of the Tunisian opposition, and leader of Ennahda Party, was amongst the first who declared Turkey as a model for Tunisia in terms of its democracy (Anadolu Agency, 2011). Similarly, Morocco's new Prime Minister Abdullah Benkirane stated that they admired the 'Turkish model of secular Islam' (Sunday's Zaman, 2011). The Turkish experience of democracy and liberal economy also impressed Mustafa Abdul Jalil, the leader of Libya's National Transitional Council (NTC). In an interview with Anatolian News Agency, he stated, 'Turkey's democratic structure is an example to Libya and the other countries that experienced the Arab Spring. Libya will look to Turkey as a model for its own political and democratic structure' (Today's Zaman, 2012a).

The Middle Eastern reformists' admiration of the Turkish model brings out a question on Turkey's role as an example or as a model. What makes Turkey so attractive for the opposition movements in the Middle East? According to Paul Salem, the director of the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut, the answer is that:

They do not look at Saudi Arabia as an attractive model; they do not look to Taliban or al-Qaeda. This movement is coming to power after people have seen the extremists and made a judgment about it... Turkey is the only real democracy in the entire Middle East. People are impressed that the AKP found a balance between cultural issues like faith, religion, nationalism and globalism...and obviously the economy. It is the only rapidly growing non-oil economy in the region (Yinanç, 2011).

Together with the model role, Turkey's role as a mediator has also been encouraged by the Western world. The country's Muslim-liberal profile was seen as an asset by the Western powers and these role prescriptions coincided with Turkish foreign policy elite's self-constructed mediator role (Al Arabiya News, 2010).

No matter how they are defined, the role prescriptions of external others seem to have influenced Turkey's national role conceptions to the same degree as the Turkish foreign policy elite's description of national self. In this regard, the policy requirements of the external others' role prescriptions did not only justify, but also paved the way for Turkish activism in the Middle East.

The foreign policy elite's inclinations to present Turkey as a source of inspiration, and the external others' generation of the model and mediator roles for Turkey, required the adaptation of certain patterns of foreign policy behaviour. In this regard, Turkish businesspersons' efforts to increase trade flow between Turkey and the Middle Eastern countries, the reform recipes suggested by Turkish foreign policy elites at regional multilateral platforms such as the OIC, Turkey's participation in military operations against the Qaddafi regime, its increasing engagement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and its conduct of muscular diplomacy towards Syria, are all the role performances that might be considered within this context.

OUTCOMES OF TURKEY'S ROLE PERFORMANCES

So far, Turkey's activism in the Middle East has been examined from the perspective of role theory. Yet, there are still certain pertinent questions that need to be addressed. What are the achievements and failures of Turkey's new role performances? Is such activism likely to produce the expected outcomes for Turkey or destined to failure in the post-Arab Spring context?

In terms of economic indicators, Turkish activism in the Middle East has produced the expected outcomes for Turkey. The following table demonstrates the balance of trade between Turkey and selected Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) states between 2003 and 2010, when AKP was in power (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2011).

The balance of trade against Turkey's favour in its trade with Saudi Arabia, Iran and Algeria can be related to Turkey's dependency on oil and related products such as LPG, LNC, petroleum and natural gas. Even though the economic indicators given above demonstrate that Turkey has achieved its objective of increasing trade with the MENA region, it can still be argued that such an achievement is mainly context dependent and vulnerable to political crises. Decreasing trade flows between Turkey and Syria after Turkey adopted a hawkish stance on Assad's repression of the Syrian opposition exemplifies the vulnerability of trade relations. Whereas Turkey's monthly exports to Syria in January 2011 were worth about 116,888,070 USD, they had sharply decreased to 65,364,120 USD in

Table 1. Balance of Trade between Turkey and Middle Eastern and North African States

	Balance of Trade 000 US Dollars (in Turkey's Favour)		
	2003	2006	2010
EGYPT	156,382	316,829	1,324,101
TUNISIA	121,875	174,799	432,911
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	589,311	1,633,412	2,634,465
LIBYA	-817,807	-1,808,090	1,506,718
IRAQ	716,457	2,213,416	4,681,782
SYRIA	-2,594	422,167	1,181,954
LEBANON	76,416	113,914	389,782
JORDAN	132,767	312,341	528,884
PALESTINE	6,035	20,653	39,729
BAHRAIN	13,683	-9,549	100,342
KUWAIT	150,022	162,978	180,537
OMAN	21,191	68,888	89,846
YEMEN	155,959	197,430	329,348
ALGERIA	-508,584	-843,830	-771,428
IRAN	-1,326,897	-4,559,709	-4,600,831
SAUDI ARABIA	-645,348	-1,268,912	-219,511

December 2011 and 63,122,470 USD in February 2012 (Turkish Exporters Assembly, 2012).

The most remarkable political outcome of Turkish activism is Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan's popularity in the Arab streets. Turkey's new role performances as regional protector and defender of Islam have enabled Erdoğan and Davutoğlu to win the hearts and minds of the Arab people. According to a public opinion poll in 2010 in Arab states, Erdoğan emerged as the most admired leader in the Middle East (Telhami, 2010).

On the other hand, Turkey's new role performances also resulted in deterioration of its relations with Israel, Syria and Iran that sparked debates on the fate of 'zero problem policy with the neighbours'. According to Steven Cook (2011), Davutoğlu's 'zero problem policy with the neighbours' proved to be unsuccessful as far as Turkey's turbulent relations with Iran, Syria, Armenia, Cyprus and the EU are concerned. Similarly Bülent Ali Rıza and Stephen Flanagan (2012:28) argue that, the recent crisis between Ankara and Damascus may have a spill over effect that can strain Turkey's relations with Iran and Russia. Another critic of AKP's foreign policy, Soner Çağaptay (2012) underlines the potential risks of Turkey's over engagement in Syria as follows:

Should al-Assad continue to reign despite Erdoğan's outspoken support for regime change, this will tarnish the Turkish leader's image as the tough guy who gets things done, the very image that has earned him respect and helped him win three successive elections since 2002.

He would also be weakened with the PKK thriving in Syria and using its territory as a springboard to launch attacks against Turkey. Then he would most certainly ask Obama to prove whether he is truly the friend that the Turkish leader thinks he is.

Under the spotlight of the above mentioned critics, the negative impacts of Turkish activism can be examined in terms of Turkey's bilateral relations with Israel, Syria and Iran. First, whatever the motivation, Turkey's attempts to adopt simultaneously the roles of regional leader, regional protector and defender of Islam culminated in a confrontation with Israel. Until the mid 2000s, Israel and Turkey, with their shared commitment to democracy and liberal economy, were performing similar roles in the Middle East. As outsiders to the region, they both represented the Western value system and such an overlap in their own national role conceptions made Turkey and Israel strategic partners. Soon after, however, Turkey realized that the policy requirements of regional protector, regional leader and defender of Islam roles were incompatible with the requirements of Turkish-Israeli partnership. As a result, Turkey gradually distanced itself from Israel.

Second, Turkey's adaptation of liberalizer role has created a conflict between Ankara and Damascus. After 1999, despite the pressures imposed by the US, Turkey maintained its friendly relations with Syria and made further attempts to integrate Syria with regional and global economic systems. The early achievements of Turkish-Syrian rapprochement were skyrocketing trade volumes, cooperation against terrorism and the elimination of visa requirements. Until 2011, Turkey refrained from participating in any international effort that aimed to punish the Assad regime. However, the Arab Spring forced Turkey to be more active as both a regional leader and liberalizer. In this sense, Turkey began to criticize Bashar Assad's methods to suppress the opposition movement in Syria and a severe crisis broke out. The strained relations between the two countries culminated in a refugee influx into Turkish territory, and recently with Syrian attack on a Turkish fighter plane.

Third, Turkey's relations with Iran were damaged because of Turkey's decision to host a NATO radar system for defensive purposes. Despite President Gül's statement underlining that the 'NATO radar system is not against Iran' (Hürriyet Daily News, 2012), such a decision elicited severe criticism from Tehran. If Turkey's need to maintain deterrence vis-à-vis a nuclear Iran is considered, the radar station in Malatya is likely to escalate the tension between the two countries in the near future. On the other hand, Turkey's appearance as a role model for Arab-Muslim states may also create a new tension between Ankara and Tehran, who see themselves as potential rivals for regional leadership. In this regard, the claim of Ali Akbar Valayati, former Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs and current advisor on International Affairs to the Supreme Leader that the Turkish model is 'unacceptable for the countries that are going through an Islamic awakening' (Dombey and Bozogmehr, 2011) can be considered as an early signal of a further deterioration of relations. The crisis between the two countries is likely to intensify after Tayyip Erdoğan's criticism of Iranian proposal for Baghdad and China instead of Istanbul, as possible venues for the next round of nuclear talks (Today's Zaman, 2012b).

CONCLUSION

Turkey's embrace of a new identity under AKP, necessitated reformulation of its foreign policy principles as well as the way of handling the issues on foreign policy agenda. The questions of "who we are?" and "how are we perceived by others?" triggered the identity transformation in domestic politics and had inevitable consequences in the foreign policy domain. On the one hand, the new Turkish identity justified particular foreign policy preferences. On the other hand, it made Kemalist envisioning and principles as "intuitively implausible, categorically excluded them as wrong or unacceptable, or made them unthinkable' (Krotz, 2002:8).

Turkey's posture in the Middle East, different from the previous periods, is now composed of regional leader, regional protector, defender of Islam, bridge, model, mediator and liberalizer roles. These roles are mainly the products of AKP echelons' self conceptions together with the feedbacks taken from external others.

Despite its nascent democracy, fragile economy and unresolved Kurdish issue, Turkey still inspires the people in the Middle East to push further for reforms. The early achievements of Turkish activism demonstrate that Turkey's adoption of new foreign policy roles has found resonance on the Arab streets. However, in terms of regional politics, Turkey's ambition to become a regional leader may culminate in crises with one or more of Iran, Syria and Israel. Nevertheless, no matter what kind of consequences Turkish activism may produce, it is easy to anticipate that Turkey's imprint on the new political landscape of the Middle East will become even more prominent in the near future.

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